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## Country Philosopher

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# Recitation was sickening

BY AMOS ARTHUR HOLMES

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I recently attended a program featuring little children. The church was filled with proud parents, and the tiny boys and girls did a splendid job. They sang with gusto and recited with confidence. And my mind traveled back almost 50 years to a time when I participated in a church program. I remember it well, because it turned into the greatest disaster of my life.

I was five years old and I attended Sunday School at the Shiloh Baptist Church. We were to give a program of music for our parents and we practiced all week. I did remarkably well in practice, and I was looking forward to the big night with great enthusiasm.

My class was to sing a little song and I was to introduce it. All I had to do, when the curtain opened, was to step forward three paces, and say, "The Sunshine Class will now sing...Jesus Loves the Little Children."

I practiced saying this one sentence continually until I knew it by heart. I had no fear of not performing to perfection. This would be fun, and I would be so proud of doing something in front of my parents.

The big night finally arrived. All of the kids were behind the curtain being shepherded into place by their teachers. We could hear the auditorium filling up and there was great excitement amongst the children. Everything became frantic as the teachers adjusted ties and straightened skirts. We could hear the people in the auditorium talking and laughing, and it was then that I noticed the nervousness of my little companions. The children were scared. I couldn't understand this as I was so extremely calm myself. What was there to be scared about? We knew the song, and I knew the small speech I had to give before we started singing. The teachers also noticed the nervousness that was growing quite heavy and they circled amongst the children whispering the advice that all performers were nervous and to be a little nervous was quite all right.

The lights in the church dimmed and the voices beyond the curtain were still. This was the moment. My self-assurance was simply marvelous. The curtain opened slowly and I saw that the church was filled. In the front row

sat my mother and father. A delicious tremor shook my body when I saw them. They would be so very proud of me and proud of the flawless recitation I was about to give.

My teacher, from offstage, signaled that it was time for me to give my one sentence. I took three paces forward, opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

I do not know what caused my paralysis. I think it was the expressions I saw on my parent's faces. When I looked down at them I saw great apprehension. Sweat was rolling from my father's forehead and my mother was frantically biting her fingernails. Why would they even consider my failing?

I began to tremble. My little knees sounded like castanets. My teacher was snapping her fingers signaling me to proceed. My classmates were staring at me and my bewilderment seemed to seep into everyone.

I then did what every normal child would have done.

I vomited.

This was certainly bad enough in itself but my throwing up caused a



chain reaction. The young children, highly nervous, became sick when they saw me become sick. Deacon Barkley, who had a very weak stomach, threw up. The organist threw up. Parents all over the auditorium were heaving and running for the exits.

The minister, a very stern, non-nonsense type, walked onto the stage. He stood looking at the disaster that had struck his church and his face held a sorrowful WHY ME' kind of expression. He stood for long moments as if in prayer. As if he were asking God for a measure of strength to see him through the next few minutes. He leaned forward and spoke into the microphone.

"LET ALL OF US REMEMBER THAT GOD LOVES THE LITTLE CHILDREN."

But he didn't sound all that sincere.